1: Bowen-Jones et al. K-5 (1955-1958) 1961
EZ6 Malta EZ6

FALLOW AND ROUGH GRAZING - Gozo (Fig. 94)

As noted above, land classification in Gozo presents special problems. The widespread occurrence of self-seeded sulla, very often heavily weed-infested, and abandoned land still carrying (on the thicker soils) fairly dense herbaceous and gruminaceous vegetation, is not an indication of completely waste land. This intermediate category is a reflection of the lesser intensity of direct pressure on agricultural resources and the greater importance of field grazing in Gozo. 311* 241 [233]

WASTELAND

All areas in which a soil mantle has never been developed or from which it has been wholly or partially removed by erosion, together with land which has obviously not been cultivated for some years, have been classified as waste. Thus, karstland as on the Marfa Ridge, the clay badlands of Ghajn Tuffieha, the abandoned terraces of Wied il-Kbir and the more recently neglected fields of il-Wilġia in Wied tal-Pwales, all fall within this category. Earlier classifications of wasteland in the Islands have attempted to postulate completely unutilised barrenness. This, on the one hand, leads to an underestimate of the extent and rate of abandonment, a feature of crucial importance, and on the other over-estimates the absence of value: much wasteland is in fact utilised for *xagħra* grazing. 311* [233]

Figs. 95[1] and 96[2] indicate the magnitude of wasteland in the Maltese Islands. Gradient as such has little effect, parent rock, water supply, accessibility and exposure all being a good deal more important. The Lower Coralline exposures are very largely waste, a result of the slow rate of physico-chemical disintegration of this massive series. The other major wasteland areas are associated with special conditions of aspect and altitude. The fact that they are largely developed on Upper Coralline rocks results not from any parent-rock intractability but from the great height at which the strata of this series generally lie and from shortage of water. As noted in Chapter III, Terra Rossa development can give very productive areas.

In Malta, the inter-relationship of aspect, topography, geology and soils is well exemplified in the northern part of the island. The structural and topographic grain is transverse to winds blowing from directions between north and west. As noted in Chapter II, these winds bring high humidity and low temperatures, during the winter season. Ecological conditions of relative bleakness inhibit vegetal growth and soil formation except in sheltered depressions. The effect on land use has been to bring the 'karst line' down to sea level on the exposed Marfa peninsula, from which it ascends south-eastwards towards the more sheltered interior ridges. The level of cultivation rises progressively higher until, on the Santi-Bingemma plateau, it extends over the whole upland area. Secondary controls are exerted by details of aspect, altitude and spring-line development. Thus Bajda Ridge, of intermediate height and lying in the lee of Mellieħa Ridge, forms one of the most continuous belts of wasteland. Structurally an anticline, and too small to contain an appreciable body of water or to allow doline formation, the Bajda Ridge is unlikely ever to allow a more intensive form of land use than that provided by the experiments in afforestation now in progress.

Comino and Cominotto, which are fragments of a shattered Upper Coralline anticline, are almost entirely waste. A few patches of cultivation in sheltered positions are all that remain of a never very extensive tilled area. Remoteness and exposure are sufficient to explain the present condition of these small islands.

Dissection and consequent exposure of the Lower Coralline have been the major processes giving rise to wasteland in Gozo. This is clearly exemplified in the fault-shattered zone of Qawra, id-Dwejra and the Wied Ilma as well as in Wied iz-Xlendi. Along the north coast, steep cliffs fall to a Lower Coralline platform which is reflected in an analogous belt of wasteland, while the barren ta'Ċenċ hills are also developed on rocks of this series. In the north-east, wasteland covers the higher and more exposed *ṣortin* areas and scattered stretches of waste occupy much of the steep and tectonically disrupted eastern

[1] [2] [See pp. 230 A & B and 231 -- Analyst)
[Text Continues on P. 233]

1: Bowen-Jones et al. K-5 (1955-1958) 1961
EZ6 Malta EZ6
GOZO

*311
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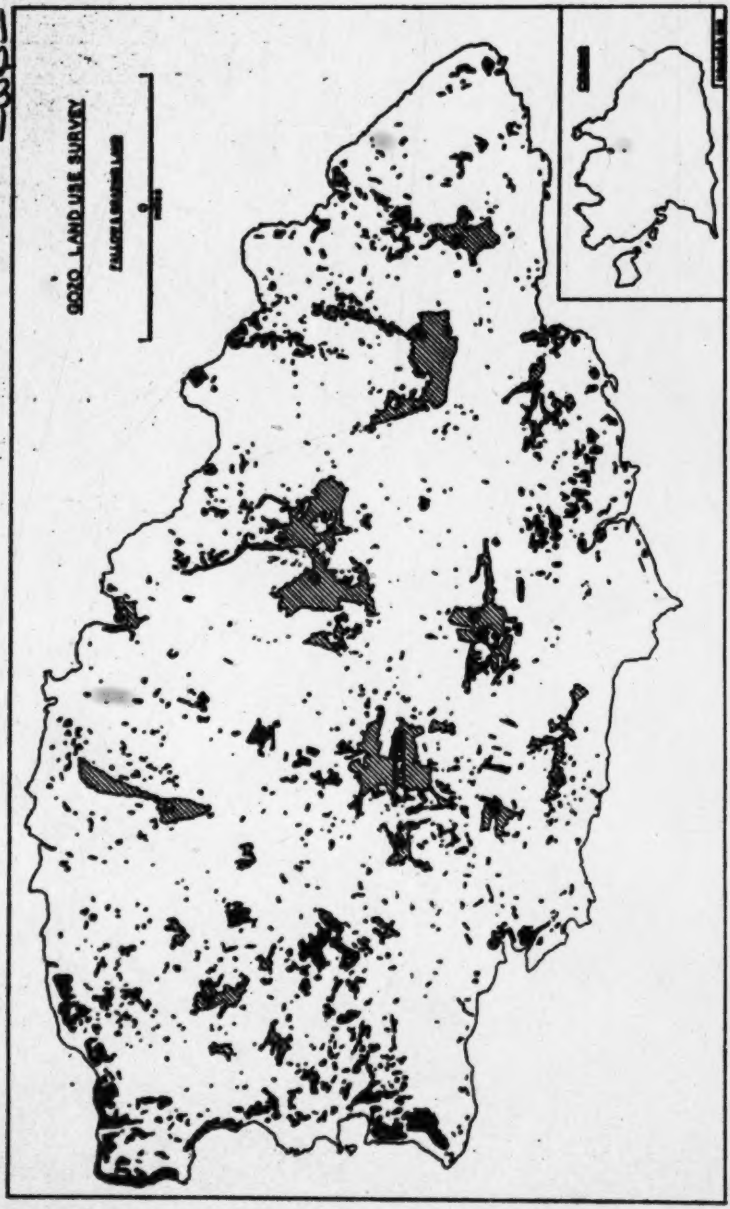

Fig. 84 Gozo: Land Use Survey: Fallow and Grazing.

1: Bowen-Jones et al. K-5 (1955-1958) 1961
EZ6 Malta EZ6
Malta

Chapter VIII

AGRICULTURAL REGIONS

Individual crop distributions have been considered in the preceding chapter but in order to understand the nature of Maltese agriculture, more complex analyses of spatial differentiation must be made. The method adopted is to identify areas characterised by particular crop assemblages and thus to define agricultural regions. 241* 311*

Over the Islands as a whole may be observed a series of distinct farming landscapes which reflect a graduation in physical and socio-economic conditions. The lowest grade of land use is represented by marginal production of the hardiest fodders and legumes. Vetches and poor barley are cultivated in small pockets of soil lying between expanses of bare karst. The regions in which this pattern is dominant, being primarily used as rough grazing land, are most suitably referred to as *xaghra*. Extensive dry farming covers much of the Islands, varying in quality particularly with variations in exposure, slope and water supply. The poorest type is restricted to low-grade cereals, sulla and the minor fodders and legumes. A medium grade of dry farming, occurring where conditions are more favourable, is characterised by crops of better quality and higher value. Potatoes become prominent and specialised production of certain vegetables such as *qarugh bagħli* appears. On well watered but non-irrigated land, the crop assemblage is further enlarged by the addition of vines on an appreciable scale. Vegetables now include both spring- and summer-grown, field and garden types, notably brassicas. Where irrigation is possible, higher-value vegetable crops such as tomatoes, melons and artichokes become widespread, although the potato is dominant. Small-scale cultivation of fruit and table-grapes is also of some importance. Finally, the *ġnien* and *rdum* lands, which are distinct although not everywhere the most intensively worked areas, are often characterised by much inter-cultivation and by the varying importance of all the high-value crops. It is here that fruit is most widely grown. These six types of crop assemblage are readily recognisable and provide the basic criteria for regional analysis of the rural landscapes of Malta and of Gozo. [233]

Malta

In Malta, there is a marked correspondence between the physiographic regions as described in Chapter II and the agricultural regions. A major threefold division may be observed in both cases:-

A. The Western Scarplands.
B. The Wied-il Ghasel District.
C. The Hills and Plains of the Centre and East.

A. THE WESTERN SCARPLANDS

The physical characteristics of this major region have been outlined in Chapter I and their effect on the distribution of waste and cultivated land noted in Chapter VII B. The south-west to north-east graining of the land is the predominant physical control, but secondary controls are exerted by details of aspect, altitude, soil and water supply, so that many local deviations from the general pattern of wasteland ridge and cultivated basin may be observed. General points concerning settlements include the tendency for these to develop at the junction of the two types of landscape, though there are important exceptions to this arrangement. The alignment of roads further affects the degree to which particular districts have been developed or neglected. The fact that road [491]

[Text Continues on P. 238]

1: Bowen-Jones et al. K-5 (1955-1958) 1961
EZ6 Malta EZ6

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Plate XVII. Roadside grazing of goats.

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415

Plate XVIII. A farming family.

241 592 (a) with the labour of members of his family limited, in many cases, as far as the women and girls are concerned to casual assistance and to grudging work by his sons until they can find some paid employment away from the home farm, and

241 464 [461] [465] (b) with the high cost of non-family labour at between £1 and 30/- per eight-hour day where a member of the family would have worked from early morning until sundown. Moreover the supply of hirable labour is by no means great nor readily available and, unless a general economic collapse forces a return to the land, there are no indications of any improvement in the position. Rather is agricultural labour likely to become scarcer and more costly.

241 [461] The problem is considerably aggravated by the fact that as already suggested, the particular characteristics of Maltese farming demand an intensive application of manual labour, both in the maintainance of the more precarious fields as well as in cultivation. Something of the detail of this need emerges from a consideration of the timetable of the Maltese farmer both as regards the annual cycle of activity and the daily round of farm-work.

TIMETABLE

221 241 The timetable of the Maltese farmer is more diverse and varied than is at first apparent. It is convenient to distinguish the daily timetable proper from the annual calendar of events. Under traditional peasant farming conditions there appears to have been a much greater degree of uniformity but as farming has been 'commercialized' so has the range of variety increased.

175 178 221 241 The peasant field-tiller depended on climate, on the crop cycle and on the sun. The year's round of field-work a century ago is recorded in an 1849 "Calendario dell'Agricoltore" (B/355) which listed the major farm activities of each month along with short articles on subjects of interest to the farmer of the time. Many of these topics, such as silk, olives, aniseed, cotton, honey, almonds, and tobacco, would not merit such prominence in a modern version of the Calendario[21]. [234] [233] More striking still is the emergence, since 1849, of dairying and stock-rearing, which was scarcely mentioned in the Calendario but has more recently grown to first importance for a large part of the farming community.

178 241 Changes of such magnitude over the century can be expected to affect the routine of farm-work and of village and family life. In the mid-nineteenth century, Maltese farming was still very much more 'peasant' than 'commercial' and the change between then and now becomes clear when a

178 241 farms of Malta and Gozo are to continue operating.

It is hoped that some at least of the answer to this problem will come from co-operation and mechanization. The first implies the pooling of labour resources of individual farmers while the latter includes the whole range of developments leading to a replacement of hand labour, as far as possible under Maltese conditions, by machinery or by more efficient implements.

CO-OPERATION

241 476 Co-operation in field work between farmers is not new in Malta[23]. It is either permanent, where two or more farmers combine with each other to work a single farm unit, sharing profits and expenses, or temporary, as when two or more farmers share the use of a threshing machine at harvest.

An example of the permanent type is a case (Case VIII) where five brothers work one farm-unit as a team with one of their number being something of a primus inter pares. This [234] is an efficient and profitable arrangement with a substantial income accruing from the herd of some thirty head and the 70 tmien of land worked by the partnership.

Another case (Case XI) is that of two unrelated farmers working one farm-unit as partners after a lifetime's friendship. So completely are their resources pooled that it is not always clear what belongs to the one and what to the other. With their respective oldest sons (teenagers) these [233] two men operate a holding of some 100 tmien and have in [234] recent years joined in the change-over from goats to cows. Their joint herd now numbers some forty head, but as an economic unit is in a much inferior position to that of the first example.

A third example (Case X) shows two brothers working the fields held by them together but maintaining clear distinctions as to which brother owns which plot. This association has also endured for decades and now includes the full-time assistance of the oldest son of the brother.

An example of a temporary association is that where two or more farmers combine to thresh the grain of each man in turn, six being the optimum number for a threshing team which normally includes the owner-operator of the hired [178] threshing machine himself working as one of the team. In the days when the traditional threshing floor with the mule and hand-winnowing was the standard method of threshing (as before the 1939-45 War) different farmers would also join and help each other at the harvest. (Today this threshing floor method is confined to cases where a long straw is required.)

000 Direct hiring of implements from a contractor as against

*159
[245] - Many stocks now 20 years old require replacement.
- No early potatoes grown "because of sea-spray".
- Sulla sufficient for his own stock.

●[233] [461] (ii) - Half of every working day is devoted to grazing the goats on waste and abandoned land.
- Fodder from his own sulla and barley but has to buy cake and beans, prices varying between £2 and £3 per qantar - expensive.

[241] (iii) - Manure from his own stock provides all his requirements and leaves surplus for sale.
- Uses 6 bags of sulphate of ammonia p.a., the only chemical fertiliser.

[231] - Pig feed costs 11/- per sack which lasts his 5 pigs 4 days.

*159 829 241 H. General.
- Has a hopeful attitude towards farming but still expects a great deal of Government help in the form of grants, loans and subsidies.
- Claims that his children intend to succeed him on the land but they are young enough to change their minds.
- Willing to accept advice, but not impressed by experts who tell him either "things he knows already" or give him advice "which is sound but not applicable to Maltese conditions".
- Has only a very general idea of costs and returns. Takes no account of value of family labour.

*159 [434] [234] [511]
- Basic income is from sale of milk (£300 in 1957) and grapes (£66) plus small quantities of vegetables (c.£12). Spends £100 p.a. on food for family in addition to his own produce.
- Typical of farmer who is satisfied with his lot, keeps his family decently fed and clothed but spends little or nothing on non-essentials. He is anxious to improve his herd, accommodation and methods but his farm provides no financial surplus with which to do this.

[454] [241] [511]
- Continues to accept a standard of living far below that of his more sophisticated compatriots.